IN THE CLAIMS:

Claims 8, 9, and 17 were previously canceled. Applicants are amending claims 1, 13 and 14 and add claims 20 and 21 herein. Claims 10, 18, and 19 have been canceled herein. All of the pending claims 1 through 7, 11-16, 20, and 21 are presented herein. This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application. Please enter these claims as amended.

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently amended) A method for reducing the risk of scoring a false-positive test result when testing at least one sample obtained from a mammal for the presence or absence of an aberrant prion protein, the method comprising:

using said at least one sample to prepare a test set and a control set;

~~treating~~denaturing protein in said ~~at least one sample~~test set with guanidine thiocyanate or a functional equivalent thereof so as to enhance antibody reactivity towards aberrant protein, while antibody reactivity towards a normal form of the protein is reduced or unchanged~~, without pre-treating said at least one sample with formic acid~~; ~~and~~

~~testing said at least one sample for the presence or absence of an aberrant prion protein.~~

leaving said control set untreated with guanidine thiocyanate or a functional equivalent thereof;

probing said test set and said control set for the presence or absence of an aberrant prion protein; and

comparing the result of said test set and said control set to look for instances of increased antibody reactivity as a function of denaturation in guanidine thiocyanate or a functional equivalent therof.

2. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein said method further comprises reducing the risk of scoring a false-negative test result by increasing the sensitivity of the test.

3. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein said at least one sample is tested in an immunoassay.

4. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 3, wherein said immunoassay is designed for mass-screening purposes.

5. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 1, further comprising treating said at least one sample with a protease to reduce the presence of normal prion protein.

6. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein said mammal is a ruminant.

7. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 6, wherein said ruminant is ovine or bovine.

8. – 10. (Canceled).

11. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 1, further comprising immunologically detecting said aberrant prion protein with at least one antibody directed against a proteinase K resistant part of the aberrant prion protein.

12. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 11, wherein said at least one antibody is directed against a proteinase K resistant N-terminal part of the aberrant prion protein.

13. (Currently amended) The method according to claim 11, wherein said at least one antibody is raised against ~~a peptide derived~~ an epitope from the aberrant prion protein.

14. (Currently amended) The method according to claim 13, wherein said ~~peptide is~~ epitope has a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOS:7-30.

15. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 11, wherein said aberrant prion protein is immunologically detected in an enzyme-linked immunoassay.

16. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 15, wherein said enzyme-linked immunoassay comprises a dot-blot assay.

17. - 19. (Canceled).

20. (New) A method of testing at least one sample obtained from a mammal for the presence or absence of an aberrant prion protein, the method comprising:

preparing said at least one sample as a tissue homogenate and dividing said at least one sample into two aliquots;

adding protease inhibitors to one first aliquot, and digesting one second aliquot with a protease, followed by the addition of protease inhibitors, so as to compare results before and after proteolysis;

spotting each said aliquot onto a solid phase to prepare a test set and a control set;

denaturing peptides contained within said set of test subjects with guanidine thiocyanate or a functional equivalent thereof so as to enhance antibody reactivity towards aberrant PrP protein, while antibody reactivity towards normal PrP protein is reduced or unchanged;

leaving said set of control subjects untreated with guanidine thiocyanate;

probing said test set and said control set for PrP protein by immunologically detecting PrP protein by way of an immunoassay with at least one antibody directed against a proteinase K resistant part of the PrP protein; and

comparing said test set to said control set wherein an increase in antibody reactivity among test set subjects after denaturation in guanidine thiocyanate relative to control set subjects is objective proof of the presence of PrP^{sc}.

21 (New) A method for increasing the reliability of a test when testing at least one sample obtained from a mammal for the presence or absence of an aberrant prion protein, the method comprising:

using said at least one sample to prepare a test set and a control set;

denaturing the protein in said test set with guanidine thiocyanate or a functional equivalent thereof so as to enhance antibody reactivity towards aberrant protein, while antibody reactivity towards a normal form of the protein is reduced or unchanged;

leaving said control set untreated with guanidine thiocyanate or a functional equivalent thereof;

probing said test set and said control set for the presence or absence of an aberrant prion protein; and

comparing the result of said test set and said control set.